



BEACON UNITARIAN CHURCH

SAFE CONGREGATION PLAN

Adopted

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SAFE CONGREGATION PLAN

1. Statement of Policy

A fundamental principle of Beacon Unitarian Church is respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We recognize that children are especially vulnerable to abuse from those in whom they place their trust, and that the effects of such abuse have a profound short term and long term impact on the victim. It is the policy of Beacon Unitarian Church that:

- a. We will provide and maintain a safe and abuse-free environment for children who participate in any programs offered through our church, where abuse includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, harassment, inappropriate touching and improper discipline.
- b. We have zero tolerance for such abuse, should it occur. Where allegations of abuse are made, such allegations will be investigated with all haste according to the procedures in this Plan, while assuring a compassionate response to the alleged victim and their family.
- c. We will protect our children's program staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations of such abuse.

This Safe Congregation Plan meets the requirements of the Robertson Hall "Abuse Prevention Declaration for Churches/Charitable Organizations" and the "Child, Family and Community Service Act" of the Province of British Columbia.

2. Definitions

The following definitions pertain to the act of abuse in the context of this Plan. Definitions with a "*" symbol are taken from "The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect (for Service Providers)", published by the Province of British Columbia. In British Columbia, under the "Child, Family and Community Service Act", a child is anyone under the age of 19. For purposes of this Plan, the generic term "child" will be used to refer to participants in both "child" and "youth" programming at Beacon Unitarian Church.

Physical Abuse*: A deliberate physical assault or action by a person that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child. It includes the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child or prevent a child from harming him/herself or others. The injuries sustained by the child may vary in severity and range from minor bruising, burns, welts or bite marks to major fractures of the bones or skull to, in the most extreme situations, death.

Sexual Abuse*: When a child is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes:

- ◆ touching or invitation to touch for sexual purposes;
- ◆ intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal);
- ◆ menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, obscene communications or stalking;
- ◆ sexual references to the child's body/behaviour by words/gestures;
- ◆ requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes;
- ◆ deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material, and
- ◆ sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse.

Emotional Abuse*: This is the most difficult type of abuse to define and recognize. It may range from ignoring to habitually humiliating the child to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. Generally, it involves acts or omissions by those in contact with a child that are likely to have serious, negative emotional impacts. Emotional abuse may occur separately from, or along with, other forms of abuse and neglect. It includes the emotional harm caused by witnessing domestic violence. Emotional abuse can include a pattern of:

- ◆ scapegoating;
- ◆ rejection;
- ◆ verbal attacks on the child;
- ◆ threats;
- ◆ insults, and
- ◆ humiliation.

Emotional harm: When emotional abuse is chronic and persistent, it can result in emotional harm to the child. Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, a child is defined as emotionally harmed if they demonstrate severe:

- ◆ anxiety;
- ◆ depression;
- ◆ withdrawal, or
- ◆ self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Child Neglect*: Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs. It involves an act of omission by the parent or guardian, resulting in (or likely to result in) harm to the child. Neglect may include failure to provide food, shelter, basic health care, supervision or protection from risks, to the extent that the child's physical health, development or safety is, or is likely to be, harmed.

Harassment: Behaviours that are found threatening or disturbing, and beyond those that are sanctioned by society.

Inappropriate Touching: Casual touching like a pat on the back or a quick hug for something done well is appropriate. Any touching which is likely to make a child feel uncomfortable or confused is inappropriate - in particular touching any part of a child's body which is typically covered by a bathing suit or underwear.

Improper Discipline: Disciplining a child is not the domain of staff and volunteers in the Religious Education program. If a child's behaviour is disruptive to others, the child should be returned to the parent or guardian.

3. Screening

A congregation offering services and programs owes a duty of care to protect its participants, its staff (paid and volunteer), its governing body, and the community-at-large.

All staff, board members, and volunteers (other than "casual" volunteers) for any position working with or related to working with children at Beacon Unitarian Church are to be screened prior to the commencement of their duties, according to the following table:

Requirement	Minister	Director R.E.	Board Members	Volunteers
Signed application	✓	✓		✓
Criminal Record Checks (every 3 yrs)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Background Reference Checks (minimum 2)	✓	✓		✓
Personal Interviews for new applicants	✓	✓		✓
Six month waiting period for volunteers new to Beacon Unitarian Church prior to eligibility to work with children				✓

"Casual" volunteers are volunteers such as parents/guardians and other interested parties that have not undergone the screening mandated in the above table. These volunteers are to be constantly monitored by screened staff and volunteers according to the procedures outlined in section 4. Where the term "volunteer" is used in this Plan, it refers to a volunteer who has been screened according to the requirements of this Plan, unless "casual" is otherwise and specifically stated.

Screening Procedure

- 3.1 There is to be a specific job description for board members, staff and volunteers (other than "casual" volunteers) for any position working with or

related to working with children. The job description for the volunteer Religious Education (RE) Teacher position is included as Appendix A of this Plan.

- 3.2 Follow a formal recruitment process. In the case of volunteer positions, a call for applications - whether a posted notice or a flyer sent home - must indicate that screening is part of the recruitment process.
- 3.3 Applicants are to complete an application form. The application form is to require the applicant to provide contact information for a minimum of 2 references. The application form for RE Teachers is included as Appendix B of this Plan.
- 3.4 Interview each applicant. The interview provides not only an opportunity to talk to the potential volunteer about their background, skills, interests, and availability, but also to explore any doubts about the suitability of the candidate.
- 3.5 Carry out reference checks. By identifying the level of trust required in the position and asking specific questions, the applicant's suitability may be easier to determine. People often do not expect that their references will be checked. Do not assume that applicants only supply the names of people who will speak well of them.
- 3.6 Each applicant is to obtain a criminal records check. The applicant must apply to the police force in the community in which they live for this check. The criminal records check should be the most comprehensive available from that jurisdiction and include a check for sexual offences involving children or vulnerable persons. Criminal records checks signal – in a very public way – that the congregation is concerned about the safety of its participants. See Appendix C for the criminal records check procedure used in RCMP jurisdictions.

The President of the Board will be responsible for determining whether information on an applicant revealed in a Criminal Records Check will disqualify the applicant for further consideration for that position.

- 3.7 Conduct orientation and training sessions. Screening does not end once a staff member or volunteer is in place. Orientation and training sessions offer an opportunity to observe staff members and volunteers in a different setting. These sessions also allow congregations to inform volunteers about policies and procedures.

- 3.8 Supervise and evaluate. The identified level of risk associated with a staff or volunteer position will determine the necessary degree of supervision and evaluation. Frequent feedback in the first year is particularly important.

4. Operational Procedures

- 4.1. The President of the Board is responsible for ensuring that all incidents of suspected or alleged abuse of children are reported according to the requirements of Section 7 “Reporting” of this Plan and there is an appropriate response to these incidents. Incident reporting forms must be completed for all cases of injury or suspected or alleged abuse as soon after the incident as possible.
- 4.2. The Director of Religious Education is responsible for ensuring that an adequate standard of safety and hygiene is maintained for all Church-sponsored programs involving children.
- 4.3. Corporal punishment and inappropriate touching, affection or discipline are prohibited.
- 4.4. Where “casual” volunteers are assisting with sponsored programs, they are to be under the constant supervision of volunteers or staff who have been screened according to the requirements of this Plan. At no time are children and youth to be left alone with a “casual” volunteer while participating in a Church-sponsored program.
- 4.5. Volunteers under the age of 19 may assist only under qualified adult supervision.
- 4.6. Ideally, 2 unrelated adult staff or volunteers will be present at all times during program activities. If this is not practical, an “open door” policy is to be maintained such that activities can be monitored at all times by designated staff or volunteers. Where activities are underway in more than one space at any given time, the Director of Religious Education is to designate a monitor to circulate from space to space periodically for surveillance and to protect other staff and volunteers against false allegations.

Children under the age of 6 are to be accompanied to a washroom break by a staff person or volunteer.

- 4.7. Where infants and toddlers in the nursery program are not under the

constant supervision of their parent or guardian, they are to be signed in and out of the nursery in a suitable registry by the parent or guardian, and access to the nursery is to be controlled. The volunteer in charge of the nursery is responsible for ensuring the safety and hygiene of the nursery room activities and is to be suitably qualified.

- 4.8. Children who are under the age of 6 are to be signed in and out of program activities in a suitable registry by the parent or guardian.
- 4.9. Signed parental/guardian consent and permission is required for Church-sponsored off-premises or overnight activities and field trips. Two unrelated adult staff or volunteers are to be present at all times. Sleepovers, camping or other overnight events are to be allowed only when all staff and volunteers have been screened according to the requirements of this Plan. The parental/guardian consent form is included as Appendix D.

Drivers must be 25 years of age or older and provide proof of a valid drivers licence and a minimum of \$1M third party liability insurance to the Director of Religious Education, prior to providing transportation for an off-premises activity. Volunteer drivers are to be considered as “volunteers working with children” for the purposes of this Plan.

- 4.10. There is to be sufficient qualified supervision of children outside and in public places (e.g. parks, libraries, amusement parks etc.)
- 4.11. Activities that could easily lead to allegations of abuse or harassment are to be avoided. These activities include, but are not limited to:
 - ◆ unsupervised internet access;
 - ◆ vehicle transportation by staff or volunteers alone with unrelated children;
 - ◆ individual photography of children
- 4.12. All staff, board members, and volunteers (other than “casual” volunteers) for any position working with or related to working with children at Beacon Unitarian Church are to sign a covenant confirming they have read, understood and are willing to comply with the requirements of this Plan. The covenant is included as Appendix E.
- 4.13. Screening documentation is to be kept on file and confidential indefinitely.

5. Premises

The Religious Education program takes place in a rented facility, and it is not

practical to modify the facility to assist in preventing and discouraging incidents of abuse. However, the following measures are to be taken:

- 5.1 The Director of Religious Education is responsible for ensuring that each room is inspected for health and safety hazards prior to each occupancy by children, including the locking of doors and closets as appropriate.
- 5.2 A basic first aid kit is to be kept with the Religious Education supplies in an accessible location.
- 5.3 At the start of each year, a roster of Beacon members who have specific first aid training will be prepared for use by Religious Education program staff and volunteers in the event of a medical emergency.

6. Training

Training is mandatory for all staff and volunteers who work with children at Beacon Unitarian Church to assist them in understanding the issue of abuse, abuse prevention and the legal responsibility to report actual or alleged events.

6.1 Initial Training

Prior to initially working with children at Beacon Unitarian Church, staff and volunteers will:

- Participate in Beacon's abuse prevention workshop;
- Familiarize themselves with the requirements of this Plan and sign a covenant according to the requirements of section 4.12.

6.2 Refresher Training

Staff and volunteers who work with children will review and reassess the requirements of this Plan annually prior to the start-up of the Fall's children programming.

- 6.3 A review of the ongoing suitability of Board members, staff and volunteers who work with children including a criminal record check is to be carried out every 3 years.

7. Reporting

- 7.1. Staff and volunteers who work with children and youth at Beacon Unitarian Church will have opportunities to speak with children, observe their behaviour and possibly notice changes over time. Their role is to be aware

of, and alert to, signs of child abuse or neglect.

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* of the province of British Columbia requires that anyone with reason to believe that a child has been, or is likely to be, at risk for abuse or neglect - and the child's parent or guardian is unwilling or unable to protect them - has a duty to report their concern to a child welfare worker. If the child is in immediate danger, the police are to be called first.

“Reason to believe” means that, based on what a person has seen or information they have received, they believe a child has been or is likely to be at risk. They do not need to be certain. It is the child welfare worker's job to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred or is likely to occur.

The child is not to be interviewed. It is the child welfare worker's job to decide on the appropriate action to take.

In most cases, the duty to report suspected child abuse or neglect overrides the duty to protect the privacy of staff, volunteers, colleagues, parents or guardians, with the exception of:

- ◆ solicitor-client privilege, and
- ◆ confidentiality provisions of the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act.

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* sets out the circumstances under which a person must report to a child welfare worker. A person must report when they have reason to believe that:

- ◆ a child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent or another person and the parent or guardian is unwilling or unable to protect the child;
- ◆ the child has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect by the child's parent or guardian;
- ◆ the child is emotionally harmed by the parent or guardian's conduct;
- ◆ the child is deprived of necessary health care;
- ◆ the child's development is likely to be seriously impaired by a treatable condition and the child's parent/guardian refuses to provide or consent to treatment;
- ◆ the child's parent/guardian is unable or unwilling to care for the child and has not made adequate provisions for the child's care;
- ◆ the child is or has been absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child's safety or well-being;
- ◆ the child's parent/guardian is dead and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care, or
- ◆ the child has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been

made for the child's care.

7.2. Should a staff member or volunteer believe that a child has been, or is likely to be, at risk for abuse or neglect or receive such a disclosure, the following actions are to be taken immediately:

- i) Report such belief or disclosure to the Tri-Cities West Neighbourhood Centre (Ministry of Children and Family Development): 604-927-4429 (08:30 - 16:30 weekdays). During evening, weekends and statutory holidays, report to 604-660-8180.
Call 911 if:
 - ◆ a child is in immediate danger, and/or
 - ◆ a criminal offence against a child has been or is likely to be committed;
- ii) Advise the President of the Board;
- iii) Complete an Incident Report as soon as possible (see Appendix F).

7.3 Where an allegation or complaint of abuse pertains to a child while participating in a Church-sponsored activity, the following additional actions are to be taken:

- i) The President of the Board will be responsible for responding to the allegation or complaint. A lawyer is to be consulted for advice.
- ii) The alleged perpetrator is to be suspended from children program duties without presuming guilt, pending outcome of the investigation.
- iii) Without admitting legal liability, express the Church's concern to the complainant and their family and assure them of the Church's commitment in assisting the investigation.
- iv) Assure confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
- v) Avoid public statements to individuals, the media or from the pulpit, without obtaining legal counsel.
- vi) Contact the Church's insurance agent to report the incident in order to satisfy the statutory conditions of the Church's liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.

APPENDIX A

**JOB DESCRIPTION
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHER**

The position of Religious Education (RE) Teacher is a part-time volunteer position under the direct responsibility of the Director of Religious Education and working in close cooperation with Beacon's Religious Education Committee.

The position requires approximately two hours of time on Sunday when RE classes are in session. In addition, an average of one and a half hours per week may need to be spent in preparation, meetings, class outings, and potlucks.

Specific Duties include:

- With RE Committee and Director of Religious Education, plan and implement yearly curriculum for class.
- Implement weekly program and curriculum including gathering resources, books, and materials.
- Attend teacher training, workshops, as scheduled throughout the year.
- Participate in the year-end evaluation of RE program.
- Arrange your own substitutes as needed, contacting other team members first and then the DRE.
- Take attendance every week and record attendance in book. Also note the number of attendees on your weekly Classroom Report Form.
- Greet newcomers, list them on the Classroom Report Form, and introduce them to the DRE; RE Registrar or teacher gives RE Registration Form to newcomers after child attends two RE classes.
- Communicate regularly with the DRE about any problems, concerns, or suggestions about class happenings.
- Notify the DRE or Janitor about any physical space problems you encounter.
- Fill out Incident Form for any accident/suspected abuse incident that occurs during class time. (*Beacon's Safe Congregation Plan Appendix F form*)
- Fill out Payment Request Voucher for reimbursement of supplies that you have purchased and submit to the RE Bookkeeper.

Skills/Knowledge/Experience/Personal Traits:

Understanding of children's learning styles and skills; enjoys working with children and youth; experience working with children; ease in relating to a wide variety of religious views.

APPENDIX B

APPLICATION FORM
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHER

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (home) _____ (work) _____ E-mail: _____

Are you 19 years of age or older? Yes ____ No ____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Experience working with children: _____

Motivation for volunteering: _____

Current and/or previous volunteer positions(s), most recent first:

Organization

Volunteer Position

Reference #1

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (home) _____ (work) _____ E-mail: _____

Relationship to applicant: _____

Interviewer's comments:

Reference #2

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (home) _____ (work) _____ E-mail: _____

Relationship to applicant: _____

Interviewer's comments:

I agree to have a Criminal Records Check carried out by the police force with jurisdiction in the community in which I live.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

**CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK PROCEDURE
RCMP JURISDICTIONS**

1. The cost for a criminal records check for paid staff is \$60.23. Volunteers are checked for free with a letter of confirmation of volunteer status from the organization requiring the criminal records check.
2. The applicant picks up a “Consent for Disclosure of Criminal Record Information” form from the local RCMP station, fills out the form and submits at the station. The “Category of Information for Disclosure” is to be initialed in each of boxes 1-4 inclusive. Also complete the reverse side of the form “Consent for Criminal Record Check for a Sexual Offence Involving Children or Vulnerable Persons”.
3. Following the check for criminal records by the RCMP, the form will be returned to the applicant with results of the check recorded on the form.
4. The applicant will present the completed “Consent for Disclosure of Criminal Record Information” to the Director of Religious Education (DRE) for an RE Teacher applicant or the President of the Board for staff or Board applicants. If the box “May or may not exist” is checked off in any of the 4 categories, the applicant must divulge the details of the infraction to the DRE or President as applicable. The DRE or President will then contact the RCMP office which carried out the check to verify this information. An applicant not willing to divulge the details of the infraction is not to be given any further consideration for the position.

APPENDIX D

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Children in the Religious Education Program of Beacon Unitarian Church are invited to take place in the following off-premises or overnight activity:

Event: _____

Location: _____

Time and Date: _____

Method of Transportation: _____

If you choose to have your child participate in this activity, please provide the following information:

Name: of Child: _____

Allergies: _____

Medical Conditions: _____

Personal Health Number: _____

I (name of parent/guardian) permit (name of child) to participate in the above off-premises/overnight activity. I give the leader of the activity permission to authorize emergency medical treatment if I cannot be reached at the number below:

Emergency Contact Number: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

COVENANT

I have read and understand the Safe Congregation Plan of Beacon Unitarian Church and agree to adhere to and uphold its requirements.

I affirm my commitment to maintain an environment free of abuse, interpersonal violence and harassment and to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This is in keeping with Beacon Unitarian Church's commitment to an environment free of discrimination based on colour, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation. I pledge to conduct myself and in a manner that conveys mutual respect and consideration.

I also pledge to do my best to protect and support those who come to me either at risk or in crisis. I accept the responsibility to educate myself about sexual misconduct, abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX F

**BEACON UNITARIAN CHURCH
INCIDENT REPORT**

Name of person reporting: _____

Date of incident: _____ Date of report: _____

Nature of incident: _____

Details of incident: _____

Signature of person reporting: _____

Actions taken: _____

Signature of President of the Board: _____